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ABSTRACT

The study ascertained some facts concerning illegal aliens relevant to making decisions concerning amnesty for those illegal aliens already in the United States. Using a probability sampling of birth certificates in Los Angeles County, California in 1980 and 1981, 715 interviews were conducted with parents of babies where, according to the birth certificate, the mother was reported to be of Mexican origin. In addition, 188 interviews were conducted with parents where the mother was reported to have been born in the United States. Information was collected on characteristics of both parents, legal status in the United States, length of residence in California and in Los Angeles County, income received in 1979 outside the United States and while residing in the United States, and utilization of health and welfare services. Respondents also gave information concerning an unmarried brother 18-45 years old or a childless sister 18-39 years old if such was living in Los Angeles County. Respondents were classified by immigration status: undocumented immigrants, resident aliens or naturalized U.S. citizens, and native born U.S. citizens. Among the findings were: (1) that undocumented parents had a lower level of educational attainment; (2) a high proportion of undocumented persons, particularly women, had no ability to speak English; (3) of those women probably eligible for welfare services, those native born had the highest proportion of welfare payments and undocumented women the lowest; (4) food stamp use did not vary significantly with immigration status; (5) enrollment in the California Medicaid program for the medically indigent was highest for those born in the United States; and (6) the enrollment of children between ages 3 and 18 in school was lowest for undocumented Mexican-origin mothers. (NQA)

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The Socioeconomic Status of Recent Mothers of Mexican Origin in Los Angeles County: A Comparison of Undocumented Migrants, Legal Migrants, and Native Citizens

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THE SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS OF RECENT MOTHERS OF MEXICAN ORIGIN IN LOS ANGELES COUNTY: A COMPARISON OF UNDOCUMENTED MIGRANTS, LEGAL MIGRANTS, AND NATIVE CITIZENS

In recent years there has been much concern in the United States about policy for dealing with undocumented (illegal) migrants. The two foci of this concern have been what additional measures, if any, should be taken to reduce the net inflow of undocumented persons and what should be done about the undocumented persons already in the United States. With respect to the latter there have been several proposals for amnesty, most notably that advanced by President Carter in 1977 (Bouvier, 1977) and that advanced by President Reagan in 1981 (Los Angeles Times, 1981). President Carter proposed that all illegal aliens who entered the country before January 1, 1970 be allowed to become permanent legal residents of the United States and that all illegal aliens who had entered between January 1, 1970 and January 1, 1977 be allowed as "temporary resident aliens" to remain in the United States for five years but without access to Medicaid, Aid to Families of Dependent Children, foodstamps, or other social benefits. More recently President Reagan has proposed that all illegal aliens who were in the United States as of January 1, 1980 be given the status of "renewable term temporary residents." Such persons could retain such status for ten years and thereafter be eligible

to become permanent legal residents of the United States. However, during the ten-year period as temporary residents, they would not be eligible to bring into the United States any family members not already here and would not be eligible for such social benefits as Medicaid, Aid to Families with Dependent Children, foodstamps, unemployment compensation, subsidized housing, etc. The United States Congress failed to act on President Carter's proposals. As of this time, Congress has not yet acted on President Reagan's proposals.

The present study, which has been funded by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, has as its chief purpose ascertaining some of the facts concerning illegal aliens which are relevant to making decisions concerning amnesty for those illegal aliens who are already in the United States. Los Angeles County is a particularly appropriate site for a study of undocumented Mexicans because of the large number purportedly resident there. The 1980 Census showed the county to have a total of almost 2.1 million persons of Spanish origin (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1981). The 1970 Census had shown a Spanish-origin population of less than 1.1 million persons, 78.2 percent of whom were of Mexican origin (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1973). Thus during the 1970-80 decade the Spanish-origin population of the county increased by more than 96 percent, a rate implying a very high rate of net in-migration. Furthermore, by 1980 the Spanish-origin population consti-

tuted 28 percent of the total population of the county. The research design for this study was one in which interviews were collected from the frame of a probability sampling of birth certificates in Los Angeles county in 1980 and 1981. The California birth certificate contains information on the ethnicity of the mother and father of the child and also on the place of birth of each parent. The research design called for interviews of a parent of all babies where according to the birth certificate either the mother or the father reported themselves to be of Mexican origin and which met some other qualifications designed to protect the rights of human subjects. These qualifications included that no respondent be interviewed if the mother's age was under 18 or if the baby was of low birthweight, or if the baby had died or been adopted, or if the mother had suffered complications of pregnancy. Separate samples were taken from the certificates in which the mother was reported to have been born in the United States and from those in which the mother was reported to have been born outside the United States.

Sequential samples with random starts were taken from all birth certificates filed in the period from August 1980 through March 1981. Different sampling proportions were used during various time segments. Accordingly, respondents were assigned weights proportiorate to the reciprocal of their sampling proportion. The original intention was to oversample births whose mothers were born outside the United States so that out of the total desired 1,000 interviews 700

would be of respondents where the mother was born outside the United States. Budgetary limitations allowed the collection of only 903 interviews. As a consequence of the decision to curtail the total number of interviews and a desire to retain about 700 interviews in which the mother was born outside the United States the actual number of interviews collected in which the mother was born in the United States was only 188. The weighted non-response rate for all respondents gathered from the frame of mothers born in the United States was 52.9 percent. The weighted non-response rate for all respondents gathered from the frame of mothers born outside the United States was 48.5 percent. This rather high nonresponse rate included such categories as nonexistent addresses, the move of the mother to a new unknown address, names never assigned to the interviewing organization, names never used by the interviewing organization, names which were found not to be qualified, names in which three unsuccessful attempts at contact were made, names for which no contact had been achieved by the cutoff date, as well as refusals.

Respondents for the interview could be either the mother or the father of the baby. In most cases, 777 out of 903, the mother was the respondent. The interview was conducted in either the Spanish or English language. In 689 out of the 903 interviews the language of the interview was Spanish. Regardless of who was the respondent, providing that both the father and mother of the baby were living

together and considered each to be the spouse of the other, we collected information on characteristics of both the mother and father of the baby. In addition, since our sampling frame excluded unmarried men or childless women, we asked each respondent to give us information concerning an unmarried brother 18 to 45 years old or a childless sister 18 to 39 years old if such was living in Los Angeles County.

In general the content of the questionnaire resembled that of the 1980 United States Census of Population. However, additional questions were asked on legal status in the United States, length of residence in California and in Los Angeles County, income received in 1979 outside the United States as well as while residing in the United States, and utilization of health and welfare services.

Results

In Tables 1 through 12 all respondents are classified by immigration status into the following three categories: (1) undocumented immigrants, (2) legal resident aliens or naturalized citizens of the United States, and (3) United States citizens born in the United States.

Considerable interest attaches to the question of the proportion of all births in Los Angeles County which take place to undocumented women of Mexican origin. Table 1 presents data on the estimated distribution by immigration status of mothers falling within the frame of the study and of the estimated proportion of all births in Los Angeles County which occurred to each category of women by immigration sta-

tus within the sampling frame of the study. These last estimates are obtained by inflating the weighted number of respondents for whom the birth certificate reported birth of the child's mother to be in the United States by the reciprocal of the response rate for such mothers and by inflating the weighted number of respondents for whom the birth certificate reported birth of the child's mother to be outside the United States by the reciprocal of the response rate for those respondents. Finally, during the period in which names were gathered for the study there were 48,186 births recorded in Los Angeles County. This figure was used as the base for the computation of the proportion of all births in the county born to those undocumented mothers encompassed by the frame of the study. This figure, 13.3 percent, is an underestimate of the proportion of all births born to undocumented mothers where either parent is of Mexican origin since the frame of the study excluded all births where the mother was under 18, or where the baby had died or been adopted, or was of low birthweight or where the mother had suffered complications of pregnancy. As of now, we have no count of the number of respondents we excluded for these reasons.

Moreover, it is also possible that some of the respondents who claimed to be legal residents had not told the truth to the interviewer. To investigate this possibility, the interviewers were instructed to ask all respondents who said they were legal resident aliens if they would show the

interviewer their "green card." Slightly more than one-half of the respondents who said they were legal resident aliens did not show a "green card." Obviously, not all of the respondents who did not show a "green card" were undocumented. Many might have refused to show their card out of a feeling that the request was improper or because leaving the room to fetch the "green card" might be excessively inconvenient. (In many of the characteristics shown in Tables 2 through 12, the legal residents who did not show a "green card" resembled the undocumented as closely as they resembled the legal resident aliens who did show a "green card." However, with respect to the age-adjusted number of children ever born, the respondents who said they were legal residents but did not show a "green card" had a greater number than either the undocumented or the legal resident aliens who did show a "green card." It is possible that this result is due to the fact that those respondents who had preschool children in addition to their newborn baby could not have easily gone to get their "green card" and the interviewer may have sensed this and may have told the respondent that she ought not to go to any bother to find and present her "green card.") Accordingly, since some of those who said they were legal resident aliens but did not show a "green card" may not have been telling the truth as to their legal status, we have another reason for suspecting that we have an underestimate of the proportion of all births in Los Angeles County which took place to undocumented mothers.

Despite the fact that we present an underestimate of the proportion of all births in Los Angeles County which took place to undocumented mothers of Mexican descent or whose spouse was of Mexican descent, the figure we show will be, for many persons, surprisingly high. The size of the figure appears to be incontrovertible evidence against the contention that most undocumented migrants are males who are either unmarried or who have left their wife behind them in Mexico.

Some additional preliminary results of the study are shown in Tables 2 through 12. Table 2 provides data on all of the parental pairs in which one or both parents were of Mexican origin. Tables 3 through 11 provide data by sex only on those parents who were themselves of Mexican origin.

Table 2 presents data on the marital ties connecting the parents of each baby according to the immigration status of the mother. It can be seen that consensual unions are most common among parents where the mother is undocumented whereas the proportion of mothers living without a partner is highest among the parents where the mother is native born.

Table 3 presents data by sex for parents of Mexican origin on age group by immigration status. A salient feature of this table is the relatively older age of the legal residents and naturalized citizens compared to the undocumented or to the native born. This result is congruent with the evidence obtained by Hirschman(1978) that most legal immig-

rants to the United States from Mexico are former undocumented residents of the United States.

Table 4 presents data for the two subgroups of undocumented parents and legal residents or naturalized citizens concerning year of first entry to the United States. It is evident that legal residents first entered the United States much earlier than the undocumented. It is further clear that the undocumented males arrived in the United States at considerably earlier dates than the undocumented females. Apparently, many men may first establish themselves in the United States before either marrying or bringing their wives into the United States from Mexico.

Table 5 presents data on ability to speak English by immigration status for male and female parents. It is shown that a high proportion of undocumented persons, particularly undocumented females, have no ability to speak English. Conversely, almost all of the native born parents speak English fluently.

Table 6 presents data on educational attainment for male and female parents. Both male and female undocumented parents show a low level of educational attainment relative to the other groups whereas those born in the United States show a high level.

Table 7 presents data on total personal income in 1979 of male and female parents who lived in the United States for 12 months in 1979 by their immigration status. For both males and females personal income is highest for those born

in the United States and lowest for the undocumented.

Tables 8, 9 and 10 contain data on the utilization of health and welfare services by female parents. Table 8 shows income in 1979 from the Aid to Families with Dependent Children Program by mother's immigration status for women who were most probably eligible for payments in 1979, namely those who were not legally married at the time of the interview and had at that time at least one child aged two or more born in the United States. Those born in the United States have the highest proportion receiving welfare payments and the undocumented have the smallest proportion. Nevertheless, almost twenty-two percent of the undocumented women shown in Table 8 received welfare payments. According to law an undocumented mother is not herself eligible for AFDC payments but is eligible to receive payments on behalf of her children born in the United States. The relatively high proportion of undocumented mothers who received payments of less than $2950 in 1979 indicates that many of these women were receiving payments only on behalf of their children born in the United States. However, a fuller analysis of the data will be necessary to determine whether any of the undocumented women were also securing payments for themselves.

Table 9 presents data on the utilization of food stamps by immigration status for female parents. It can be seen that the proportion of women using food stamps does not vary significantly by immigration status. Nevertheless, undocu-

mented women have smaller percentages receiving food stamps with a value of $100 or more per month.

Table 10 shows the enrollment in the Medi-Cal program (the California Medicaid program for the medically indigent). By law undocumented parents are not eligible for Medi-Cal; however, those of their children born in the United States are eligible. Table 10 shows that enrollment in Medi-Cal is highest for those born in the United States. Surprisingly, there appears to be little difference between the legal immigrants and the undocumented with respect to Medi-Cal enrollment with the exception that the baby only is more apt to be enrolled if the female parent is undocumented.

Table 11 shows the age-standardized number of children ever born to female parents by immigration status. The median number of children ever born is lowest for those born in the United States and highest for those who are legal residents or naturalized citizens.

Table 12 shows the school enrollment of the children of Mexican-origin mothers who were 3 through 18 years of age by their own age and by their mother's immigration status. At ages three through five, children of undocumented mothers have the lowest enrollment rates and children of those born in the United States the highest. At ages six through thirteen the same pattern holds but almost all children are enrolled in school. At ages 14 through 18, almost 24 percent of the children of undocumented mothers are not

enrolled in school whereas there are no children of this age not enrolled if their mother is a U.S. citizen or a legal resident alien.

In the future we hope to analyze the data more fully in order to answer several questions of interest to policy-makers. First we should like to extrapolate from the figures we have obtained concerning the proportion of all parents of Mexican origin who are undocumented to figures concerning the proportion undocumented among all women and men of reproductive age who have ever had a child. We plan to do this in conjunction with data from the 1980 Census for Los Angeles County. We propose to insert into a 1980 Census matrix of persons of Mexican birth by age, sex, educational attainment and children ever born the specific figures on the proportion undocumented obtained from an identical matrix from our own sample. Secondly, we are interested in the consequences for the health and welfare system of proposals which would give amnesty to those who are currently undocumented. Thirdly, we shall try to estimate the changes in income which might result if the undocumented were given amnesty. Finally, we shall attempt to estimate the net tax consequences of amnesty proposals. The net tax consequence should result from the difference between the possible increase in government budgets necessitated by possible increased utilization of health and welfare services and the possible added governmental revenues provoked by possible increases in income for the undocumented.

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TABLE 1
Estimated Number and Percentage Distribution of All Births in Los Angeles County during the Study Period which Took Place to Mothers or Fathers of Mexican Origin (and which Met Additional Qualifying Specifications) by Immigration Status of the Mother

			Immigration Status of Mother:		
	Total births in Los Angeles County during Study Period	Births to Study Population during Study Period	Undocumented	Legal resident or naturalized citizen	Born in United States
Number of Births	48,186	13,986	6,419	3,458	4,109
Percentage Distribution of Total Births	100.0	29.0	13.3	7.1	8.5
Percentage Distribution of Births in Study Population		100.0	45.9	24.7	29.4

TABLE 2

Marital Ties Connecting the Parents of the Baby According to Immigration Status of the Mother

Marital Ties	Immigration Status of the Mother: Undocumented	Legal resident or naturalized Citizen	Born in United States
Percentage Distribution: Total	100.00	100.00	100.00
Legally married, spouse present	71.93	87.67	67.80
Consensually married, spouse present	13.01	2.19	4.70
Partner, not a spouse, present	0.47	0.55	0.73
Legally married, spouse not present	0.00	0.33	0.73
No partner present	14.60	9.26	26.04
Weighted Number of Cases	3,391	1,825	2,062

TABLE 3

Percentage Distribution by Age Group of Mexican-origin Parents by Sex and by Own Immigration Status

Age Group	Mothers Immigration Status: Undocumented	Mothers Immigration Status: Legal Resident or Naturalized Citizen	Mothers Immigration Status: Born in United States	Fathers Immigration Status: Undocumented	Fathers Immigration Status: Legal Resident or Naturalized Citizen	Fathers Immigration Status: Born in United States
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00
18 and 19	7.03	5.96	11.45	1.42	1.61	4.29
20 to 24	42.15	24.66	36.95	22.72	12.03	25.21
25 to 29	29.08	32.32	34.25	33.03	28.64	35.56
30 to 34	13.89	21.62	11.89	25.13	33.42	18.01
35 and over	7.85	15.43	5.45	17.70	24.30	16.93
Weighted Number of Cases	3,298	1,711	1,816	2,746	1,613	1,305

TABLE 4

Percentage Distribution by Year of First Entry into the United States of Mexican-origin Parents by Sex and by Own Immigration Status

Year of First Entry	Mothers Immigration Status: Undocumented	Mothers Immigration Status: Legal Resident or Naturalized Citizen	Mothers Immigration Status: Born in United States	Fathers Immigration Status: Undocumented	Fathers Immigration Status: Legal Resident or Naturalized Citizen	Fathers Immigration Status: Born in United States
Total	100.00	100.00	*	100.00	100.00	*
Before 1965	1.70	18.06		2.42	20.15	
1965-1969	7.64	24.55		12.87	33.50	
1970-1971	5.94	17.18		12.21	15.62	
1972-1973	13.28	15.55		23.42	15.62	
1974-1975	21.13	11.46		18.51	9.92	
1976-1977	22.13	8.07		19.24	1.10	
1978	11.89	3.04		5.68	2.88	
1979 or Later	16.28	2.10		5.65	1.22	
Weighted Number of Cases	3,298	1,711		2,728	1,633	

* Not Applicable

TABLE 5

Percentage Distribution of Ability to Speak English of Mexican-origin Parents by Sex and by own Immigration Status

Ability to Speak English	Mothers Immigration Status: Undocumented	Mothers Immigration Status: Legal Resident or Naturalized Citizen	Mothers Immigration Status: Born in United States	Fathers Immigration Status: Undocumented	Fathers Immigration Status: Legal Resident or Naturalized Citizen	Fathers Immigration Status: Born in United States
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00
Fluent	1.33	18.70	94.46	3.42	22.11	91.82
Moderate	9.58	16.19	4.24	18.13	36.80	4.39
With difficulty	23.41	38.11	0.82	51.38	33.35	3.79
None	66.04	27.00	0.49	27.07	7.73	0.00
Weighted Number of Cases	3,298	1,711	1,840	2,752	1,655	1,320

TABLE 6

Percentage Distribution of Years of School Completed by Mexican-origin Parents by Sex and by own Immigration Status

Years of School Completed	Mothers Immigration Status: Undocumented	Mothers Immigration Status: Legal Resident or Naturalized Citizen	Mothers Immigration Status: Born in United States	Fathers Immigration Status: Undocumented	Fathers Immigration Status: Legal Resident or Naturalized Citizen	Fathers Immigration Status: Born in United States
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00
Less than 4	21.89	11.96	0.00	21.41	7.74	0.46
4 or 5	19.10	12.08	0.00	14.66	11.62	1.22
6	33.47	25.69	1.30	36.96	20.96	1.68
7 or 8	9.58	8.68	3.21	8.99	9.77	3.73
9 through 11	13.04	19.59	36.20	14.44	23.54	31.78
12	2.43	16.83	41.68	1.92	18.56	35.06
13 or more	0.49	5.16	17.61	1.62	7.81	26.07
Weighted Number of Cases	3,298	1,705	1,840	2,714	1,627	1,312

TABLE 7

Percentage Distribution of Total Personal Income in 1979 by Sex and own Immigration Status of Mexican-origin Parents who lived 12 Months in the United States in 1979

Income in 1979	Mothers Immigration Status: Undocumented	Mothers Immigration Status: Legal Resident or Naturalized Citizen	Mothers Immigration Status: Born in United States	Fathers Immigration Status: Undocumented	Fathers Immigration Status: Legal Resident or Naturalized Citizen	Fathers Immigration Status: Born in United States
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00
None	47.48	46.69	29.59	3.10	4.77	7.38
$1 to $2949	13.51	11.95	15.12	4.03	0.86	2.31
$2950 to $5949	20.43	12.49	15.95	12.02	4.46	5.53
$5950 to $9949	18.24	23.41	24.99	54.42	31.31	17.68
$9950 to $14949	0.34	4.73	11.89	20.64	37.86	32.74
$14950 and over	0.00	0.73	2.47	5.78	20.73	34.36
Weighted Number of Cases	2917	1649	1825	2578	1635	1301

TABLE 8

Percentage Distribution of Income in 1979 from Aid to Families with Dependent Children by Immigration Status for Mexican-origin Mothers who were not legally Married at Time of Interview, lived in the United States for 12 Months in 1979, and Had One or More Children Aged Two or Older Born in the United States at Time of Interview

	Immigration Status of the Mother		
1979 AFDC Income	Undocumented	Legal resident or naturalized Citizen	Born in United States
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00
None	81.27	79.10	54.09
$1 to $2949	13.38	7.46	0.00
$2950 to $5949	5.35	8.96	20.28
$5950 to $9949	0.00	4.48	25.62
Weighted Number of Cases	299	134	281

TABLE 9

Percentage Distribution of Current Monthly Income from Food Stamps of Mexican-origin Parents by Immigration Status

Food Stamp Income	Immigration Status of the Mother: Undocumented	Legal resident or naturalized Citizen	Born in United States
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00
None	81.13	84.15	80.82
$1 to $24	1.04	1.30	1.79
$25 to $49	9.75	2.72	1.96
$50 to $74	3.28	3.19	3.91
$75 to $99	1.78	3.31	4.57
$100 to $149	2.33	2.96	4.18
$150 to $199	0.37	2.37	1.96
$200 to $299	0.31	0.00	0.82
Weighted Number of Cases	3,260	1,691	1,840

TABLE 10

Percentage Distribution of Enrollment in the Medi-Cal Program of Mexican-origin Mothers by Immigration Status

	Immigration Status of the Mother		
Enrollment in Medi-Cal	Undocumented	Legal resident or naturalized Citizen	Born in United States
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00
Entire family	19.77	19.64	41.20
Only the Baby	4.21	0.00	1.63
No One in the Family	76.02	80.36	57.17
Weighted Number of Cases	3,298	1,711	1,840

TABLE 11

Percentage Distribution of Number of Children Ever Born to Mexican-origin Mothers Standardized for Age by the Direct Method*

Children Ever Born	Immigration Status of the Mother: Undocumented	Legal resident or naturalized Citizen	Born in United States
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00
1 child	27.03	29.62	33.00
2 children	31.16	21.53	34.52
3 children	22.41	27.23	17.93
4 children	7.58	9.81	8.08
5 or more children	11.82	11.81	6.47
Median Number of Children Ever Born	2.24	2.45	1.99
Weighted Number of Cases	3,298	1,707	1,816

*Standard is the Distribution by Age of All Mexican-origin Mothers

TABLE 12

Percentage Distribution of Children of Mexican-origin Mothers by Enrollment Status by Age and Mother's Immigration Status

	Immigration Status of the Mother		
Age by Enrollment Status	Undocumented	Legal resident or naturalized Citizen	Born in United States
Ages 3 through 5, Total	100.00	100.00	100.00
Enrolled	28.39	37.30	44.57
Not Enrolled	71.61	62.70	55.43
Weighted Number of Cases	1,613	874	599
Ages 6 through 13, Total	100.00	100.00	100.00
Enrolled	97.99	99.01	100.00
Not Enrolled	2.01	0.99	0.00
Weighted Number of Cases	1,391	1,614	797
Ages 14 through 18, Total	100.00	100.00	100.00
Enrolled	76.36	100.00	100.00
Not Enrolled	23.64	0.00	0.00
Weighted Number of Cases	220	200	81